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SHULTZ DEFENDS SEAMAN'S RELEASE

Finds No Legal Basis to Hold Ukrainian Who Fled Ship

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 10—Secretary of State George P. Shultz said today that he believed the Soviet seaman who jumped ship, touching off a debate on whether his ship should have been barred from leaving American waters, had initially "decided somehow that he wanted to come to the United States."

But the Soviet merchant ship, the Marshal Konev, is now outside American territorial waters, and Mr. Shultz defended the Reagan Administration's decision to permit the seaman, Miroslav Medved, a 23-year old Ukrainian, to sail with the Konev despite a subpoena by the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Mr. Shultz spoke after the committee's chairman, Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, harshly criticized the State Department for its role in Mr. Medved's case. As the ship entered international waters Saturday night, Mr. Helms said that in deciding to allow the ship to depart, "the State Department has shown once again its true colors."

"Once again," he said, "the State Department clearly decided that it is more important to appease the Soviet Union than to allow a young man to have an unfettered chance for freedom."

'No Legal Basis'

Mr. Shultz defended the State Department's action in investigating the incident, after Mr. Medved had already "mistakenly" been taken back to the ship. He said it was the "consensus" of all the agencies involved in Washington that there was "no legal basis for holding the ship."

"All the people who were there are satisfied that he was perfectly in control of himself and able to make a decision in which he repeatedly stated that he wished to go back," he said.

Mr. Shultz said it was a mistake in the first place for the American border guards to force the seaman back to his ship after he jumped overboard and later jumped from a launch when he was being returned to his ship by American immigration officials. But he said that once aboard the Soviet ship, Mr. Medved, was apparently persuaded convincingly, whether through drugs or intimidation, not to seek asylum in the United States.

"It would look as though he decided somehow that he wanted to come to the United States," Mr. Shultz said on the CBS News program "Face the Nation," in answer to the question of why Mr. Medved jumped ship in the first place. "And after he was subjected to whatever he was subjected to aboard that ship, he changed his mind."

Remarks About Parents

He said that in the interview later conducted by American officials with Mr. Medved, "he repeatedly referred to 'mama and papa' and he talked about life."

"So I have no basis for being explicit about what threats may have been suggested to him, but it is clear that he had his mother and father on his mind," he said.

When asked about the defection last week of Vitaly S. Yurchenko, the Soviet intelligence official who had originally defected to the United States last summer, Mr. Shultz said, "I think he is a high person in the Soviet K.G.B."

"My opinion is that he defected and for some reason or other, changed his mind," he said.

He declined to go into the value of the information that Mr. Yurchenko might have provided.